



Al-Risala 1984

June

Editorial

Human history, it is said, can be broadly divided into two parts: an age of superstition and an age of science. In recent times this division of human history has found great favour with a number of western philosophers, especially Bertrand Russell, and it is accurate enough in itself. In several books, notably; *'Why I am not a Christian'* and *'The Impact of Science on Society'*, Russell has traced convincingly and eloquently the emergence of human society from an age of darkness and superstition to an age of scientific enlightenment.

But Russell makes one fundamental error. In defining the root-causes of superstition and scientific thinking, he postulates that superstition stems from religion, and science from freedom from the illusions of religious thought.

Russell would be right in his first hypothesis if he qualified "religion" as "religion based on polytheism" or "distorted religion", for polytheism, indeed, is the root-cause of superstition. Polytheism is to treat what is not God, as God. Clearly this kind of religious unrealism can only generate unrealistic thinking in every walk of life, and superstition is just another name for an unrealistic approach.

If polytheism is the root-cause of superstition, what, then, is the root-cause of scientific thought? The answer, as Arnold Toynbee has shown, is monotheism. Monotheism is to worship the one and only God who has created and sustains the universe. It is a fact that there is only one God; our acknowledgement of that fact, and our submission and allegiance to Him alone, are acts of the utmost realism. When this belief enters one's heart, one adopts a realistic' approach to life, and science is just another name for a realistic approach.

The direct result of the superstition that comes from polytheism is that phenomena of creation are considered as objects of worship. Inevitably this belief inhibits any objective study regarding their nature, thus preventing any advance in the field of science. But when God is considered as the object of worship, then all these phenomena become objects of investigation. The way becomes open for scientific research. This is how monotheism, or true religion, cultivates scientific thought.

FASTING

A Symbol of Piety

The animal of sacrifice has been named '*Shaeera*' (Symbol) in the Quran (22:36). Mention is also made of the fact that neither its flesh nor its blood will ever reach God: it is human piety which will reach Him (22:37).

This shows that in Islam there are certain things which are significant as symbols and embody some inward reality. The animal of sacrifice is one of them. The word *shaeera* refers to a tangible symbol indicative of some profound reality. For example, God requires His servants to sacrifice - for His sake - all un-Islamic feelings and ambitions. This is a psychological sacrifice. God has commanded man to sacrifice an animal as a symbol of that psychological sacrifice.

While slaughtering an animal a Muslim utters these words: My prayers and my sacrifices, my life and my death, are all for God, lord of the Creation. His doing so expresses the idea that the sacrificing of an animal is no more than an outward symbol of an inward reality. Only those who, while slaughtering their animals, have it clearly in their minds that they are in fact sacrificing their very existence for God, have made a true sacrifice. To them the slaughtered animal becomes a tangible symbol of having eliminated selfish desires and cravings.

Fasting is another such symbol. Abstinence from food is in reality a symbol of abstinence from sins. Food is a prime necessity of man. Refraining from food is an expression of the willingness of a servant of God to forsake everything, even food and water, for the sake of his Lord.

Abu Huraira, a companion of the Prophet, relates that the Prophet said:

Whoever does not refrain from lying and acting dishonestly while he is fasting is not required by God to refrain from food and water.

(Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud)

The essence of fasting is to abstain from sinful actions. Whoever continues to perpetrate sinful actions while on a strict fast is following only its outward form and ignoring it in essence. God has no need of such meaningless acts of worship.

Proclaiming the Truth: The Responsibility of the Muslim Community

If Muslims fail to communicate the divine message, they forfeit the right to be called the followers of the Prophet.

From the beginning of the history of man, God sent a series of Prophets to the world. The Prophets were a human agency by which knowledge of truth was communicated to man:

We have revealed Our will to you as We revealed it to Noah and to the prophets who came after him; as We revealed it to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon and David, to whom We gave the Psalms. Of some apostles We have already told you; but there are others of whom We have not yet spoken – and God spoke directly to Moses apostles who brought good news to mankind and admonished them, that they might have no plea against God after their coming. God is Mighty and Wise.

(Qur'an, 4:165)

Adam was not only the first man; he was the first prophet too. Prophets continued to be sent until, in the 7th century of the Christian era, it was God's will that the chain of prophethood be terminated. The Prophet Mohammad (570-632 A.D) was the final Messenger of God. But as God's message is concerned, it still has to be communicated to man, just as it had to be communicated in the time of the prophets. The followers of the Prophet Mohammad have been chosen for this task. God's final Messenger proclaimed the whole truth to us; it is now our duty to follow his example and proclaim it to mankind until the Last Day:

In this as in former scriptures He has given you the name of Muslims, so that His apostle may testify against you, and that you yourselves may testify against your fellowmen.

(Quran, 22:78)

This is no collateral task; it is the very purpose of the Muslim community's existence. According, to the Qur'an the Prophets only proved themselves when they communicated their message in full form to their peoples; in the same way Muslims can only prove themselves by communicating it to the rest of mankind:

Apostle, convey what is revealed to you from your Lord; if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message.

(Qur'an, 5:67)

Just as the Prophets' right to be called prophets is dependent on them conveying the message of God, so the Muslims' right to be called Muslims is dependent on their communication of that same message:

Say: 'This is my path. With sure knowledge, I call on you to have faith in God, I and all my followers.'

(Qur'an, 12:108)

The Muslims have been called the "best nation" in the Quran. This is due to the fact that the mission which previously was entrusted to prophets has now been entrusted to them:

You are the best nation that has ever been raised up for mankind. You enjoin justice and forbid evil.

(Qur'an, 3: 110)

Clearly, if the Muslims fail to carry out this mission, then they forfeit their right to be called the 'best nation'. What is worse, they lose the right to be called followers of Mohammad (may peace be upon him), for they failed to communicate the message of truth with which He entrusted them, for it to be handed over to the rest of mankind.

5 June 1984

Keeping fast and breaking fast with lawful things

Anas Ibn Malik tells about two women who kept fast, and sat with one another talking maliciously and complaining about others. When the Prophet heard about them he said, "They have not fasted. How can one have fasted who eats the flesh of humans." Others have reported the Prophet's words as follows:

"They kept fast from that which God had made lawful for them, and they broke their fast with that which God has prohibited them. They sat with one another and ate the flesh of others."

Concerning Zakat

'Zakat', or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the rate of 2.5%, on all wealth that is subject to growth. Eight categories of people, eligible to receive *Zakat*, have been specified in this verse of the Quran:

Alms shall be used only for the advancement of God's cause, for the ransom of captives and debtors, and for distribution among the poor, the destitute, wayfarers, those that are employed in collecting alms, and those that are converted to the faith. That is a duty enjoined by God. He is Wise and All-knowing. (9:60)

So, as is clear from this verse, one of the ways that *Zakat* can be spent is "for the cause of God". Though the words of the Quran are general, the consensus of Muslim theologians is that they refer to holy war: it is those who are voluntarily engaged in holy war, and have not been appointed any salary by the government, who should receive alms given "for the cause of God."

(Fiqh-us- Sunnah, Vol. I"p.393)

If we accept this interpretation, then it means that the instruction to give *Zakat* "for the cause of God" may, to all intents and purposes, be misapplied. This form of voluntary participation in wars was only possible in ancient times; under modern conditions there is no question of it. In the present age war has become so complicated and technical that only those who have received regular training are able to take any real part in it: to allow untrained people to enter the field of battle is tantamount to inviting defeat. In other words, only those who are employed by the government can participate in war nowadays. According to this interpretation, the above injunction is really no longer applicable.

The words "for the cause of God" are general in their application. They include any task that is performed for God's cause, being especially applicable to that work which the Quran calls "calling to the service of God." The true objective of Islam is preaching, not fighting. Calling people to submit themselves to God is the Islamic point of departure; war is only resorted to when the other party starts hostilities, and forces the preachers of Islam to take up arms to defend themselves.

The Egyptian-scholar, Rashid Raza, has noted in his commentary of the Quran that the words "for the cause of God" are equally applicable to those who strive to spread the word of God:

The best way to give alms "for the cause of God" in the present age, is to contribute to the training of preachers, and to their dispatch by Islamic organizations to non-Muslim lands, and to continue to give financial support to these preachers, just as non-Muslims do for the propagation of their religion. *(Tafseer Manar)*

The Inexplicable

The human brain is so complex that even today, after extensive research, we know very little about it. As one expert has said: "The more we know, the more we realize how little we know, and how much more we need to know."

Research tells us that even geniuses like Einstein, who appear to have used their brain capacities to the full, only utilized a small part of them. The major part of their brains remained unused throughout their lives. The question arises, then, as to how and why nature produced this marvelous thing called the human brain? Was it really through an evolutionary process? It is said that everything develops according to usage and exigency. But how has that part of the mind, which has never been put to use, come into existence? Darwinism asserts that the human organism, including the brain, has developed in response to the challenges it has faced in its efforts to survive. But how does one explain the formation and development of parts of the brain which have never even been used? If "usage" is the creator of things, then how can lack of usage have created anything? The continued existence of an unused part of the brain in every human being proves that it is provided by some external agency rather than acquired by man's efforts; it negates Darwin's theory that a selection process, involving the survival of the fittest, is at work in nature.

Problem of Evil: A Price of Good

By misusing his freedom, man has polluted the world. But there was no other way of selecting the priceless soul, worthy of entering Paradise.

In a word, the call to Islam is a call to paradise. Paradise is God's delicate and exquisite world. It will be inhabited by those who have attained to divine characteristics in their lives; those who have displayed in their worldly affairs the qualities of true humanity; those who are moved by the impact of the eternal world of God rather than by political and economic conditions. It is such people who are being selected in this world. Those who prove themselves – in both thought and deed – worthy of living in heavenly surroundings will be picked out and made to enter heaven. Others will be deprived of God's blessings. They will be cast far away into an everlasting of darkness.

Besides man, the rest of the world is incredibly beautiful. One only has to look at the luxuriant bloom of a tree and the fragile tenderness of a flower; one only has to gaze at the spectacles of nature, on land and in space; so attractive will one find them that one will not wish to remove one's gaze. But the world of man is a cruel and polluted world. Why this difference? The reason is that in the rest of the world there is direct and total implementation of the will of God. It is exactly as God wishes it to be. But to man He has given freedom. 'By misusing his freedom, man has created hell on earth. In truth, God alone has power over all that is good: wherever He withholds His power there is hell and wherever He enforces it there is heaven.

The question is, why did God take the risk of giving man freedom, and letting him turn God's beautiful world into a torture-chamber by his rebellious actions? The answer is that there was no other way of selecting those priceless souls who are worthy of entering heaven. The whole vast world of God, and the countless objects it contains, is fully obedient to God. There is nothing from tiny ants to massive constellations that wavers even slightly from His will. But these things are subservient because they are powerless; they have no option but to adopt the path of obedience. God required an intelligent and realistic being that, in spite of its power, would realize that it was powerless; a being that would surrender to God of its own free will, without any compulsion. It is for the selection of such rare and precious souls that God has created life on earth. From ancient times until the present day, the matter that has perplexed the human mind more than any other is the problem of evil in the world of man. In the words of one philosopher, the whole of human history seems to be a register of cruelty and evil. It is quite 'true that man has used his freedom in a most tyrannical way. But God tolerated such great evil for one reason alone: without it there was no way of selecting that lofty species which would be fit to be accommodated in heaven. Only under conditions of freedom and power could individuals be chosen from among the human race, concerning whom God's angels, that watch over the world, would testify

that these are the ones who had complete power of their own, but made themselves powerless for the sake of God. The terrible evil that occurs on earth is really the price of a wonderful good: that from the jungle of humanity those blessed souls should be picked out who, consciously and deliberately, surrender to God. These are the ones who obey God on the basis of realism, not on the basis of compulsion.

Such souls stand out from the rest of mankind. They had the chance to deny the truth, but they did not do so; they were able to assume a high position for themselves, but they showed themselves content to occupy a rear seat, and give pride of place to God; they could have sought to consolidate their own power and interests, but they voluntarily relinquished all selfish aims, and sought to consolidate the truth alone. Such souls could not be selected unless they were placed under conditions of total freedom. Such conditions could not come into being unless the price of freedom – evil in the world of man – was also born.

The purpose of the Islamic call is to search for such individuals.

PRAYER

Here, There and Everywhere

An old peasant was seated alone in the last pew of the village church. "What are you waiting for?" he was asked, and he answered, "I am looking at Him and He is looking at me."

The answer of the peasant expresses the essence of prayer. True prayer is an act of communication with an Invisible Being; it is to be aware of the omnipresence of God, and to submit to His infinite might; it is to realize that he is the source of all beauty, wisdom, truth and strength.

An act of this nature is not just performed at certain times; it is a state of consciousness which permeates one's whole being and manifests itself in all one's actions. If one's remembrance of God is confined to a place of worship, and not reproduced in everyday life, then one's prayer is not prayer at all for it has not sprung from true remembrance of God.

How can one be humble before God and then go out and be proud before one's fellow human beings? How can one show exemplary self-discipline in one's execution of the postures and movements of prayer and then live as if one is bound by no code of conduct? How can one pledge oneself to service of God in prayer and then serve nothing but one's own self and desires in real life? How can one be a picture of piety one moment and a barbarian for the rest of the time?

The truth is that inconsistency of this nature can only come from artificial prayer – prayer performed because it is the done thing rather than as a conscious expression of awareness of God. True prayer comes from remembrance of God, and one who remembers God cannot forget Him. True prayer is a way of life, and the truest way of life is literally a way of prayer.

10 June 1984

True Muslims should be dearer to each other than wealth and riches.

Abdullah Ibn Umer once said: "There was a time when not one of us considered himself more worthy of wealth and riches than his brethren. But now has come a time when we put wealth and riches first, and our brethren second."

11 June 1984

From Affluence to Ashes

Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was the greatest industrial magnate of modern India. He led an extremely principled life, which was the secret of his success. Starting his career with paltry resources at the age of twelve, he reached such a height of success that his family now has wider commercial interests than any other single family in India.

Mr. Birla would always rise at five in the morning, and remain engrossed in his work until 9 p.m. He led very simple life, often cooking his own meals. He drank coffee instead of liquor, and would take nothing but water in between meals. Whether in India or abroad, he never missed his morning walk. On June 11, 1983 when he was in London, he went out after breakfast for a walk in Regent Street. After a while he felt some discomfort and informed his aids. Alarmed, they brought him back home immediately. No sooner had he reached home than he collapsed. He was taken to London's Middlesex Hospital, where he regained consciousness for a while. "What is wrong with me, Doctor?" he enquired. The doctors told him that they would be able to say within five minutes, after a check-up. But he died before the doctors could complete their examination. It was Mr. Birla's wish that his last rites should be performed at the place of his death. Accordingly, he was cremated at an electric crematorium in London, and his ashes were brought to India to be scattered in the rivers of his mother country.

Mr. Birla wrote many books. The Hindi title of one of them is '*Rupaye ki kahani*' ('*Money story*'). Mr. Birla's "*money-story*" became a story of ashes in the end.

So it is with everyone in this world. Everyone is busy recording his success story, ignorant of the fact that what awaits him at the end of life's journey is a story of failure rather than success.

11 June 1984

Sticking to truth even at times of grievance

Umer once said: "The best response one can make to one who disobeys God with regard to you, is to obey God with regard to him."

The Evil Which Men's Hands Have Done

“Evil appears on land and sea as a result of the evil which men's hands have done. This is so that they may taste the evil of their own works and mend their ways.”

(Quran, 30:41)

When this verse of the Quran was revealed, and for centuries afterwards, wars were fought on land. It was not until the 16th century and the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) that human conflict came to span the oceans as well.

With World War II the aircraft carrier was introduced into naval warfare. The attack on Pearl Harbour by Japanese carrier-based aircraft operating from over 3600 nautical miles and the subsequent battles in the Pacific more than demonstrated the irrefutable advantages of this floating airfield. Naval aviation dominated and dictated the war at sea and it was obvious that the carrier had arrived. This mobile platform with its inbuilt security-system could be employed far out at sea to provide an effective sea-based air element, capable of countering air, surface and submarine threats.

Having thus invested land and sea with the tools of war, man spread destruction further afield by constructing air-to-air hit missiles. Any future conflict between the super powers will be basically fought in the air. And the destructive urge did not stop there: with its “star wars” programme at least one of the super-powers has now signaled its intent to acquire military capacity in space.

God entrusted the charge of His earth to man, but man failed in this task; he polluted the land, sea and air. God gave man an immaculate world in which to live, but man contaminated the perfect world of God. Man has thus forfeited the right to retain possession of the world in future. The only thing that enables man to rebel against God is the power that he has been given on earth. What awaits him is that he should be divested of all power, leaving God to take over direct control of the earth as he already has done with the rest of the universe. When this happens, evil-doers will be displaced; only those who conformed to the will of God shall be adjudged fit to live with Him in eternal peace.

On Death's Doorstep

Of all the stages through which man will have to pass, death is the most certain. It is possible for one not to be endowed with life at all, but one who is alive is sure, also, to die. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day the eyes of those who see will fade and their tongues freeze into silence. Every human being will one day find himself standing at death's doorstep, with this world behind him and ahead of him the eternal world of the hereafter. He will be leaving this world, never to return, and entering a world which he will never leave. In the world which he is entering there will be no opportunity for action; there will be only salvation or damnation in accordance with one's actions on earth.

While life is indefinite, death is absolutely definite. We are only alive because we have not yet died, and there is no fixed time for death. We are forever advancing towards it; death is closer to us than life itself. People consider themselves alive, but it would be truer to say that they are dead. No one can be sure when death will come; it might strike at any instant. Death, then, is not some future event; we are already as good as dead. For this reason the Prophet Mohammad has told us to think of ourselves as lying in the grave.

Death obliterates all in its wake. It is the most tremendous event of our lives. But the prospect would not be so formidable if death were just the end of life. If all that death meant was the end of man – the moving, seeing, hearing being who lives on earth then it, would still be an event of frightful proportions; but it would be a temporary calamity not a permanent one.

The gravity of the situation lies in death not being the end of life, but rather the beginning of a new, eternal life, a world of everlasting reward or retribution.

Everyone is on a journey from life unto death. Some have set their sights on the world, others on the hereafter. Some dwell on what meets the eye, others on what lies beyond the superficial gaze. Some strive to satisfy their own desires and egos, others are restless in love and fear of God. Both types of people appear the same in this world: they both take rest when night comes, and in the morning once again pursue their chosen paths in life. But in relation to the life after death, there is a world of difference between the two: those who live in God and the hereafter are redeeming themselves, while those who live in worldly pleasures and selfish desires are condemning themselves to doom.

The Moment of Truth

The power-supply used to be plentiful in the Ivory Coast. The country had at one time been called the "Showcase of Africa" thanks to its glittering array of houses and shops.

In December 1983, everything suddenly changed. People were forced to eat by candlelight in luxury hotels, while houses and offices were lit by lanterns. Hydro-electric stations which had supplied ninety-two percent of the Ivory Coast's electricity were brought to a standstill by a severe drought which reduced the water flowing through the dams to a trickle. The turbines simply stopped running, and the electricity supply fell so low that at times there would be no power for up to 18 hours. Industrial production was reduced by 65%. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators and other gadgets ceased to operate.

For fear of being caught in the lift, many businessmen gave up going to their offices. One commuter explained his situation to a New York Times correspondent:

For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here.

This businessman, dwelling in air-conditioned surroundings in the heart of Africa, was living in an artificial world. When the electricity failed him, he realized that in reality things were very different from what he had supposed.

The same is true, on a larger scale, of all mankind. Man considers himself free in the present world. He thinks of everything he has as his own property. But when death comes it will dawn on him, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right; he had taken what was God's to be his own; he was responsible to God for his actions, but he lived under the misapprehension that, whatever he did, he would never be taken to task for it.

What is Worship?

To Nilma Devi, an Indian dancer, dancing is a divine art. So deeply involved is she in her art that she feels unable to fully express herself in her act, powerless to reproduce – in the form of restricted bodily movements - the feeling of total abandon that a dancer seeks to convey. As she said in an interview to *The Hindustan Times*, “the dance starts where the gymnastics ends.” To her, dancing is not a profession, it is a way of life. She feels empty as if there is no aim in her life – when not dancing.

Such dedication to a “way of life” can also be called worship. A dancer’s dedication to her art creates feelings of the greatest profundity within her. Dancing becomes for her a way of life. She feels how inadequate the dance forms are when it comes to expressing the tumult of her inner emotions. She fails to express herself fully in the way she wants to. She feels empty when not dancing. There appears to her to be no point in life without dancing – nothing to which she can relate.

The same is true of worship of God. True worship is a divine dance, for it comes from discovery of God – an event of such immense proportions that it makes one dance. The state of mind of one making such a discovery is just like that of the dancer devoted to her art: God becomes the focal point in his life; he has no life of his own when separated from God; so deep are his feelings for his Lord that he cannot find words to adequately convey them.

Knowledge of God the greatest worship

Anas Ibn Malik says that a man came to the Prophet and asked him what action was best. "Knowledge of God", he answered. The man repeated his question and the Prophet gave the same answer. "I am asking about actions." the man objected "and you are telling me about knowledge." "A little action is beneficial when performed with knowledge," the Prophet said, "and much action is of no benefit when it is performed without knowledge."

Ideal Women

The Prophet once remarked that the best woman of the Jewish people was Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the best woman of his people, Khadija, the daughter of Khuwailid.

More light is thrown on the superiority of these two women by the following two statements of the Prophet:

Aisha says that the only other wife of the Prophet that she ever felt envious of was Khadija, even though she was not a contemporary of hers. "Whenever the Prophet sacrificed a goat," Aisha says, "he would tell me to send some meat to Khadija's friends. One day I got annoyed. 'Oh no, not Khadija again,' I exclaimed. 'Her love has been imbibed into my heart', the Prophet said."

Aisha says that the Prophet would not leave home without praising Khadija. One day he mentioned Khadija and I got annoyed. 'She was just an old woman,' I said. 'God has given you better than her instead.' This angered the Prophet, who said: 'God knows, he has given me no better than her. She believed when others disbelieved. She had faith in me when others denied me. She gave me financial support when others left me in the cold. And God gave me children by her, which He has not given me by my other wives.'

The special historical status that Mary and Khadija enjoy is due to the fact that they both gave themselves entirely up to God; they both attached their own will to that of the Almighty.

When the Judaic era was drawing to a close, a woman was required who would be fit to be the mother of a miraculous prophet of the nature of Jesus, may peace be upon him. God had ordained that the final prophet of the Jewish people should be born without a father. For this purpose, a woman was needed whose innocence and chastity were beyond question. The Virgin Mary lived up to this standard. By living a life of extraordinary chastity, she showed herself fit to be selected as the mother of Jesus.

The circumstances of the final prophet, Mohammad, may peace be upon him, were such that he needed a woman who would put her life and her property entirely in his hands, and would never complain about anything. God selected Khadija for this work because of her superlative qualities. She gave up everything – her life, her property, her leisure and her comfort – for the sake of the Holy Prophet. She suffered tremendous affliction, but never complained. These qualities made her worthy in God's sight to be the companion of His final prophet.

In every day and age, women and men are needed who will devote themselves to the mission of Islam; people who are willing to involve themselves in the scheme that God seeks to implement in the world. Such people are like a small cog-wheel, which revolves only according to the motion of a bigger cog-wheel, in this case the will of God. This is undoubtedly a trying task; but it is also one that carries a vast reward.

To perform this task is, in the words of the Quran, to help God" (Quran, 22:40). There can be no doubt about the excellence and superiority of those whom God deigns to make His helpers.

The destitute are those who have nothing to their credit in the next world

Abu Huraira says that the companions were sitting with the Prophet one day, when he said to them, "Who would you say is really destitute?" "Those who have no money," they ventured-"In my community," the Prophet said, "the destitute are those who pray, fast, and give alms, yet at the same time are harsh to others, accuse others falsely, take other's property, spill blood and kill. Their good deeds will be given to others until they have none left, and the payment still remains to be made; they will be made to bear the evil deeds of others and will be cast into hell.

17 June 1984

The one who prays lives under God's protection

Salman Farsi says that he went to Abu Bakr to ask for some advice. "Salman," he said, "fear God. You can be sure that the Muslims will soon be victorious, but your share in these victories will only be what you need for food and apparel. And as for those who pray to God, God protects them night and day. And do not slay any man, for if you do so you will forfeit God's protection and He will cast you, face down, into hell."

The Real Islam

Within three hundred years of its inception, Islamic government and civilization had been established in most of the populated regions of the world. Mecca was the religious capital of this vast empire, and Baghdad the political and cultural centre. The whole of Spain – except Astoria – was under Muslim rule, as were the Mediterranean islands of Sicily, Crete and Cyprus.

Various towns of southern Italy, such as Bari and Amalfi, were under the influence of Islamic culture. The northern Arabian territories of Syria and Armenia were permanently incorporated into the Islamic empire. Islam reigned supreme as far as the Caucasus Mountains on the border of Russia, in Iraq, Iran and the whole of Afghanistan. Muslim territory extended north to the Danube, and east to Khwarizm and the mountains of Farghana. In the eighth century AD, Muslims crossed the River Indus and annexed the fertile plains surrounding it.

These conquests were achieved by virtue of God's special succour. There was a great divine scheme behind them, and that was to eliminate polytheism from the world and ensure the preservation of the Qur'an. Both these aims were fully achieved.

Yet these very conquests, which were the making of Islam in the early days, proved to be the undoing of latter-day Muslims. They started to look at Islam in the light of its political history, whereas Islam should be viewed in the light of its teachings.

When a Muslim today thinks of Islamic revival, it is revival of Islamic history that immediately springs to his mind. To him, Islamic revival means a revival of the tradition of conquest. But true Islamic revival is an individual event, not one to be sought on the international arena. Born-again Islam can only come into being from born-again individuals who are truly aware of the greatness and glory of God, and live in fear of Him; who, in their dealings with others, show that they are conscious of the fact that they are accountable to God for their actions; who live for the next world, having made admission into paradise and salvation from hell-fire their greatest aim in life. An Islamic life is one oriented towards the life after death, but if one has a wrong attitude to religion then it will become a means of seeking the world.

The True Basis of Equality

The aim of communism is to set man on an equal social and economic footing. The distinction between bourgeois and proletariat is one which communist philosophy and society, from Karl Marx onward, has always sought to eradicate.

Yet experience consistently shows that, no matter what efforts are taken by the state, social strata remain a part of human life.

The latest of these experiences is that which is presently being felt in China. Hot on the heels of "spiritual pollution" (see Urdu *Al-Risala*, February 1984; English *Al-Risala*, April 84). The servant problem has now captured the attention of Communist China leaders. According to a recent statement on the "socialization of housework" by Yang Zhengyan, deputy general secretary of Peking City Council, thirty thousand maids are working in the capital and there is a demand for more. Two-thirds of Peking's maids work for senior officials and top intellectuals of the communist party. Any Yang's statement reveals a growth in their employment by "ordinary workers."

This employment of servants is in blatant flagrance of communist principles. But even communists have been forced to admit that such discrepancy is inevitable in society. As Yang himself says: "They are an inevitable phenomenon of today's social life and cannot be abolished."

The "equality of man" is a common and noble human ideal. Yet efforts to make this ideal a reality of human life are a consistent failure. This is because man seeks to base equality on a foundation in which there can be no equality. It is inevitable that there should be social and economic differences among men, just as there are differences of race and colour. Without these differences, the normal functions of life cannot be performed. This is a truth that has been expressed in the Quran in the following words:

God has caused some of you to excel others in worldly possessions. Those who have been favoured do not give their wealth to those whom their right hands possess so as to be equal in that respect. Would they deny God's goodness? (16:71)

The only realistic and practical from that equality in the world of man can take, then, is through realization that all men and women are equal before God; all are His creatures and will return to Him after death. If they are equal in God's sight, despite all their differences, then they should be equal in man's sight also; not in worldly terms, but in eternal terms. This equality will take on real form in the next world; it is present in abstract form in this world.

Accepting Defeat

In 1831, an American citizen went into business. In 1832 his business failed, so he entered the field of politics, but was no more successful in that sphere. He reverted to business in 1834, and was again a failure.

In 1841, he had a nervous breakdown. Once recovered, he again entered the political arena, in the hope that his party would nominate him as a candidate for Congress. His hopes were dashed, however, when his name failed to appear in the list of candidates. The first chance he had to run for the Senate was in 1855, but he was defeated in the election. In 1858, he once again stood in the congressional elections, and once again lost.

The name of this repeatedly unsuccessful person was Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). So great were his services to his country that he is now known as the architect of modern America.

How did Abraham Lincoln manage to gain such a great reputation in American political and national history? How did he win his way to such a high position? According to Dr. Norman Vincent Peel, the secret behind his success was that "he knew how to accept defeat."

The great secret of life is realism, and there is no form of realism greater than accepting defeat. To do so is to acknowledge the fact that, far from being ahead of others, one is behind them. In other words, it is to know where one stands in life. Once defeat is accepted, one is immediately in a position to start life's journey afresh, for such a journey can only commence from where one actually is; it cannot start from a point that one has not yet reached.

The Most Important Part of the Qur'an

While mentioning the Quran in his book, "The History of the Arabs", Professor Philip Hitti has written:

The most impressive parts of the Qur'an deal with eschatology. Sentiments of this nature are usually expressed by non-Muslims who read the Qur'an. They tend to be most impressed by verses dealing with life after death. So how strange it is that this is the very thing that Muslims derive least from the Qur'an. Muslims see everything in the Qur'an, but they miss the Qur'an's main theme, a theme that recurs on every page.

The reason for this is that non-Muslims generally read the Quran with an open mind; they read it in order to find out what it contains. So they do not add or subtract from what they find within its pages. But this is not the case with Muslims. For the most part, Muslims seek either one of two things – grace or pride – when they read the Qur'an.

Some, seeing the Qur'an as the most holy scripture, just recite it in order to receive the grace of God. Then there are others who take pride in the Qur'an. They see it as the great book of the Muslim people, and read it out of this feeling of pride. It is only natural that such people should begin to see the Qur'an in the light of the times. They are sure that their glorious book must be a collection of the important issues of the day. Those who see Socialism as the major force of the age then read Socialism into the Qur'an. Those who deem science to be of overriding importance see the greatness of the Qur'an in the form of science. For those obsessed with law and politics, the most important discovery to be made in the Qur'an are statements dealing with these topics.

The truth is that Qur'an is a book of eternity. It came to the world to warn man of the coming of the Last Day. It is a verbal Trumpet, blown before the actual Trumpet which will herald the arrival of that day. Successful are those who are awoken by this verbal Trumpet. When the real-life Trumpet is blown, it will profit no one to awaken.

When Truth is Revealed

Some people have not, in their hearts, bowed to God. Their outward prostration is a mere pretence. In the next world, they will be told to bow down before the Lord, but they will not be able to do so. (Quran, 68:42)”

Prostration is not just a ritual and time bound sort of physical action; it is to surrender oneself to sublime reality. It is to make oneself follow truth in one’s whole life. So this verse of the Quran does not just refer to prostration in a limited sense; it indicates a truth which pertains to the whole of one’s life.

In this world, people – both on an individual and national level – do not in their hearts bow to the reality; they do not adopt the path of truth. Yet in their outward demeanour they pretend to be on the side of truth; they speak words which make it seem that they are in the right and are not wronging or exploiting others.

But such deceit is only possible in this world of trial. In the next world everything will change. Fake notes can be passed on the streets, but banks will not accept them. In the same way in the next world there will be no possibility of making lies appear true, and unjustness appear like justness.

In the next world words will refuse to take on false meanings. No one will be able to call injustice justice and disguise falsehood as truth. The difference between outward and inward will disappear. One will only be able to express what is in one’s heart. Man will appear exactly as he was in relation to reality, rather than in the manner which he used to contrive in front of others.

If people can convince others that they are in the right, then they are sure that they have been proved right. But, in fact, only those who are proved right in God’s sight are truly in the right. In the next world only those who are truly right will be proved right. Falsehood will be exposed as nothing but false. This verse, then, does not only refer to hypocritical prostration; it gives us an indication of the outcome facing both individuals and nations.

How to Lead, Even in Defeat

In 827 A.D., the Mediterranean island of Sicily became part of the growing Islamic empire. For nearly three hundred years it remained under Islamic rule. Then, in 1090, it was reconquered by the Normans.

The founder of the Norman kingdom of Sicily was Roger II (1095-1154). In 1110 he succeeded his brother as count of Sicily and in 1130 was crowned king. Although he belonged to a nation of conquerors, and it was the Muslims whom he had defeated, he still retained a high respect for Arabs and Islam. His coronation mantle was designed by Muslim artists, and had Arabic inscriptions woven into it. After his coronation, he decided that he would like to have a chart showing the full extent of the Norman Empire. He chose a Muslim cartographer, Al-Idrisi, to design this chart, for he was the greatest expert in the field. Al-Idrisi then went on to prepare an atlas for the king, consisting of seventy maps and extensive geographical data. Originally written in Arabic, the first European edition of this atlas was published in 1619.

The selection of Al-Idrisi for the mammoth task of preparing maps of the whole of the known world shows, as the historian J.H. Kramers has pointed out, that at that time the intellectual and academic superiority of Muslims was accepted by one and all. Roger II certainly appreciated the worth of Muslim scholars: he encouraged and sponsored them in their work and – in the words of one historian – “made Sicily a major meeting place for Christian and Arab scholars.”

Though defeated on the field of battle, Muslims continued their intellectual and academic dominance, even in the court of their conqueror. This was because at that time Muslims were far and wide the most advanced race in almost every field of knowledge. The legacy of Islam lives on in European languages, which retain many words of Arabic origin.

Muslims today complain of their political, economic and military subjection to non-Muslim nations. They think that they can take back, by protest and militancy, what has been seized from them. But the case of Roger II of Sicily – his respect for Muslim scholars and their continued intellectual domination even after military defeat – shows that the solution to the problems of the Muslims in the modern age lies in their cultivating technological capability, and establishing dominance in the field of modern scientific knowledge. This can be achieved – not by protests and militant “fundamentalism”, but by earnest academic endeavour alone; it can be acquired by seeking to give to the world, rather than just take.